



**Programmes de bioéthique**

Département de médecine sociale et préventive

École de santé publique de l'Université de Montréal (ÉSPUM)

C.P. 6128, succursale Centre-ville, Montréal, Québec, Canada H3C 3J7

March 25, 2014

Dr. Alain Beaudet, President  
Dr. Jane Aubin, Chief Scientific Officer/Vice-President of Research at CIHR  
Members of Governing Council  
Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)  
160 Elgin Street, Address Locator 4809A  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0W9

Re: Task Force on Ethics Reform

Dear Drs. Beaudet, Aubin, and Members of Governing Council,

We, Ethics Designates serving on CIHR Institutes' Advisory Boards, are writing this letter to support the response of the Task Force on Ethics Reform to the recent response from CIHR.

First, we would like to express as a group our strong support for the recommendations in the Final Report of the Task Force on Ethics Reform. We are convinced, based on our extensive collective experience, that the strong ethics leadership that the Task Force proposes can only be assumed by a reputable expert in this area. Reiterating the terms employed by the Task Force Report, this person should be nationally and internationally recognized as a leading scholar and researcher in ethics, parallel to the level of scientific expertise required in a specific area of health research for an individual to be appointed as a Scientific Director of a CIHR Institute. The thin and procedural view of ethics as presented in the refreshed CIHR Roadmap is firm evidence of the need for this expertise in order to develop a full and effective place for ethics within CIHR.

Whilst we note and respect the disciplinary expertise of those proposed to represent ethics at CIHR in the Management Plan, they do not have any substantive expertise in ethics. This is a major flaw because it sends a contradictory message that leading ethics within CIHR does not require relevant knowledge, expertise or experience in spite of CIHR's commitment to evidence-based medicine. This directly undermines the credibility of CIHR's response to the Task Force. Not surprisingly, the Management Plan has thus elicited strong reactions from ethics researchers across Canada. We call upon CIHR to reconsider its response to the Task Force recommendations and take this unique opportunity to demonstrate leadership and vision in ethics.

Second, we would like to express our disappointment regarding the fact that throughout the process of putting together the Management Plan, CIHR neglected to consult with us or engage us in discussion. It is surprising that, with easy access to a range of leading Canadian experts in ethics, CIHR Management, CIHR Science Council and CIHR Governing Council have not seen

yet the relevance of the input of the ethics designates into an ongoing process central to our initial nomination and ongoing presence as members of Institute Advisory Boards.

Finally, we join the Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee on Ethics in the request for transparency regarding the process, not just the outcomes. Indeed, the ethics community in Canada and internationally is following the recent developments at CIHR and expressing concerns. An excellent way to promote transparency and build trust would be to present the ethics reform at the upcoming meetings of the Canadian Association of Research Ethics Boards (April 25-26) and the Canadian Bioethics Society (May 28-31) and engage our communities in discussion. This has been done recently regarding other proposed reforms at CIHR, and would be appropriate regarding the ethics reform as well.

Sincerely,

Vardit Ravitsky, Ethics Designate for the [Institute of Genetics](#)

Suzanne Tough, Ethics Designate for the [Institute of Aboriginal Peoples' Health](#)

Ross Upshur, Ethics Designate for the [Institute of Aging](#)

Françoise Baylis, Ethics Designate for the [Institute of Gender and Health](#)

Pascale Lehoux, Ethics Designate for the [Institute of Health Services and Policy Research](#)

Vassilios Papadopoulos, Ethics Designate for the [Institute of Human Development, Child and Youth Health](#)

Christopher Kaposy, Ethics Designate for the [Institute of Infection and Immunity](#)

Stephen Robinovitch, Ethics Designate for the [Institute of Musculoskeletal Health and Arthritis](#)

Eric Racine, Ethics Designate for the [Institute of Neurosciences, Mental Health and Addiction](#)

Amit Garg, Ethics Designate for the [Institute of Nutrition, Metabolism and Diabetes](#)

Angus Dawson, Ethics Designate for the [Institute of Population and Public Health](#)

CC: SCE Vice-Chair, Lisa Schwartz